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ABSTRACT

The publisher's perspective of testing and the curriculum can be described in terms of the criteria for selecting norm-referenced standardized achievement tests: (1) market need--what the customer needs and wants; (2) product match--whether the product neets the need; (3) distribution--whether or not the product can be sold; and (4) end user satisfaction--whether the end user, not necessarily the purchaser, is satisfied. Other issues include definitions of the need, the customer, the real end user, and the product; and how to determine satisfaction. In previous years, testing or research directors typically purchased tests; now offices of curriculum and instruction play a major role. As a result, many school districts are calling for curriculum-referenced nationally normed tests. In most cases, the teacher is the end user of the information provided about the student. It is difficult for a test of reasonable length to match all curricula, since special curriculum contents such as local history are common. Limited budgets may result in purchase of an inadequate customized test matching only part of the curriculum. Ways to measure user satisfaction include the absence of complaints and the usefulness of tests for improving instruction. (GDC)

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TESTING AND THE CURRICULUM: A PUBLISHER'S PERSPECTIVE

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INTRODUCTION

My presentation is to be focused on the publisher's perspective of testing and the curriculum. One might first ask what is a publisher? That's a difficult question. Hugh Heffner, for example, remains Publisher at **Playboy Magazine.** I can assure you, however, that other than sharing a title, we have nothing else in common. Instead of attempting to define the word publisher, it might be a bit easier to examine what a publisher does. Although this question is not easily answered either, it might be constructive to respond to it by focusing upon one key area-- the selection of products.

The publisher does select products to be published. He does not do so in isolation, nor can he afford to be out of touch with the market or the environment in which his product is to dwell. The selection process is every bit as critical as the development of the product itself. If the selection process is accomplished in a proper fashion, it helps provide a blueprint which will eventually serve the test developer.

The focus of this symposium--Testing and the Curriculum--is a critical issue for a publisher of tests. What I propose to do here is to examine this issue through the eyes of the publisher using a fairly common business tool to create the structure for that examination.

SELECTING NEW PRODUCTS

One typical approach to the selection of new products, an approach I believe developed originally by the Boston Consulting Group, and modified over the years to meet the needs of countless companies, is a simple four cell schematic representing key selection criteria. (See Figure 1). The basic criteria contained in the schematic are market need, product match, marketing distribution, and end user satisfaction.

Figure 1

NEW PRODUCT SELECTION CRITERIA

MARKET NEED (Does customer need/want the product?)	PRODUCT MATCH (Does the product offered meet the need?)
MARKETING DISTRIBUTION (SALES) (Can we sell into the market/ distribute the product?)	END USER SATISFACTION (Is the real end user satisfied?)

The figure is simple, yet of vital importance. In addressing market need, what we really mean is what does the customer need, or what does the customer want from the product? (N.B.: What the customer needs and what the customer wants may be two quite different things). By product match, I mean, does the product offered meet the need? The question underlying marketing distribution, is can the product be sold into the market and can it be properly distributed? By end user satisfaction, I mean is the real end user satisfied with what he or she receives--i.e.,the product?

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

When one looks past the criterion labels and the initial definitional questions which describes each, a series of other key questions arise. Specifically, in order to determine the information needs represented by each of the cells, one must first be able to respond to the following questions:

1. What is the need?
2. Who is the customer?
3. Who is the real end user?
4. What is the product?
5. How can satisfaction be determined?

To provide you with the so-called publisher's perspective concerning curriculum and testing, I propose to apply the criteria and the questions articulated to a typical NRT--as seen in today's environment. Now before you ask me what I mean, allow me to hasten to say that I will attempt to describe "today's environment" as I discuss market need. I should also point out that there may not really be a typical NRT. Most publishers like to think that their test is unique, and as such, is the best. However, those of us who build such products or those who review them are familiar with their similarities--similarities that the market demands. Hence, when I refer to a typical NRT,

I am referring to those features typically included in most nationally norm-referenced standardized tests published by one of the major test publishers and commonly used in school districts across the nation.

PUBLISHER'S PERSPECTIVE

In addressing the market need, it is necessary to deal with the specific questions, what is the need and who is the customer? I would suggest that the need and the customer are interrelated in this case. For example, it is more likely that curriculum-referenced information may be needed by those who design curriculum or deliver instruction, than by those who provide nationally-comparative information to a board of education or to the media. There is, of course, a considerable amount of overlap between the information required by one customer and that of another.

At one time, defining the customer in the norm-referenced test market was a fairly straightforward activity. The customer or buyer of the test was the individual within a school district or state agency charged with the conduct of the testing program. In most larger school districts this was the director of testing, or the director of research, evaluation, measurement, planning, or somesuch title. In smaller districts, if there was not a director of testing, typically the function was handled by either the director of pupil personnel and counseling, or by an assistant superintendent charged with testing as well as perhaps a half-a-dozen other curricular or operations-related responsibilities.

Within the last several years, however, we have seen a dramatic turnaround in terms of the individuals who influence the selection and purchase of norm-referenced standardized tests. Offices of curriculum and instruction, who for years played a secondary role in test selection, are now playing a major role. As a result, many districts are now calling for curriculum-referenced nationally normed tests.

In determining who is the customer, one should also take into consideration the fact that the customer and the end user may, in fact, be two different individuals or groups. The director of testing may make the ultimate decision as to what test to adopt, but the teacher, who may or may not play a role in that selection process, may be the actual primary end user. (Somebody may consider the pupil the end user, and in a sense, that is correct. However, although the pupil should be carefully considered, it is information on the pupil that is provided to the teacher to use).

It should also be pointed out that there is both formal and informal influence exerted in determining what the actual need might be and who makes the decision. The person who actually makes the buy decision and who has the formal responsibility for doing so may be influenced informally to such an extent that the needs of multiple primary customers must be taken into consideration.

Another area to consider in defining market need is to determine whether the need is for a product or for a service or for a combination of both. Is the customer looking for a standard, shelf, norm-referenced test? What are the customer's selection criteria? Or is the customer equally interested in related scoring services, staff development support, curriculum matches, and presentations to the board of education and/or community?

Still another consideration in dealing with the need of the customer is the so-called "difficulty" of the test. As a result of the excellence in education movement, increased emphasis upon "rigor" in instruction and in testing has become commonplace. A biproduct of this has been a call for longer and more comprehensive achievement tests. A related legitimate question is whether, in fact, a more rigorous test is what the customer really wants, or whether it is the perception of rigor in which they are more

interested. The toughening up the curriculum aside, most school superintendents would have a great deal of difficulty explaining to their boards of education and publics why the test scores in their districts suddenly plummeted. We know that there will be some downward movement due to the fact of the change in norms, but just how much of a drop will be tolerated, remains to be seen.

Product match refers to whether the product offered meets the needs of the customer. Key to this product selection criterion is the question, "what exactly is the product?" The newly ressurrected emphasis upon curriculum in testing has resulted in a movement away from "traditional" NRTs, claiming to measure a broad sampling of the national curriculum, to a narrower, more specific focus on either local or state curricular emphases. In years past providing the customer with a listing of the objectives covered by an NRT would suffice for most districts. Today it has become increasingly common for districts or states to request that their local or state curriculum be matched to NRT objectives and content coverage.

There are a number of difficulties inherent in this. First, and perhaps most serious, relates to a school district's expectation that a nationally-normed test will perfectly match the local curriculum. Unless that local curriculum is, by some accident, perfectly representative of all national curricular trends, then by definition, it will not match perfectly. In fact, if the local curricula has been designed to emphasize specific curricular objectives that are important locally (and which may not be included at all in the curriculum in other places--e.g., local history), then the local curriculum will not be fully represented in the objectives and content of the norm-referenced test. Nevertheless, districts and states are, with increasing regularity, requesting special content/curriculum match studies to be undertaken and using the results as the primary factor in deciding upon a test.

Another inherent danger is the proliferation of "we do it all" products. While it is true that certain norm-referenced tests can in fact be used to generate linkages to criterion-referenced materials via objective matches and data collected on populations who have taken both the NRT and CRT, the last several years have seen a number of test publishers make claims for their products that simply cannot be psychometrically substantiated. Such claims typically catch up with the publishers, and in at least one instance, the company has gone out of business and in another it has been sold and then sold again. Related to the "we can do it all" type of product is the failure of certain consumers to realize that the more they require of a product, the longer that product typically will be. Although it would be nice to be able to generate an enormous amount of complex individual pupil data from a short survey test, the limits of psychometric theory currently preclude doing so.

Still another problem relates to the chameleon-like quality ascribed to certain tests by those tests' publishers. A test is either long or short or somewhere in-between; it is not all three. A test is either difficult or it is not; it's P values tell the story as do other indicators. Recent curricular emphases have resulted in certain publishers making claims for their instruments that vary depending upon the needs of the customer. While it is true that certain instruments can and do meet a variety of needs, certain needs simply cannot be met simultaneously.

Another biproduct of the curriculum and testing emphasis is the proliferation of test preparation materials and the very real danger that teaching to the test may mushroom. While it is important that this be mentioned, it is a topic that alone might account for a complete syposium and could not be considered in any detail at this time here.

The question associated with the marketing distribution criterion is, "can we sell into the

market and distribute the product successfully?" For example, one major impact of the curriculum emphasis in testing is the increased reliance on customized, versus shelf products. By their very nature, customized tests cost more to produce, and, as such, are more expensive. At the same time, however, school districts are tending to test more pupils, in some cases more often, yet do not tend to have additional dollars to spend. This could easily result in cutting corners, and in some cases, in producing curriculum-referenced tests that measure only a small portion of the key curricular objectives in a school district. The end result is a customized curriculum-referenced test that actually measures less of the district's curriculum than a shelf NRT would. Do test publishers view this as a desirable market in light of existing products?

Another difficulty related to this criterion is that of price. A number of recent state contracts have emphasized low bid. The greater the emphasis on price, as opposed to quality, the closer NRT tests will begin to approximate a commodity business. When this happens, the very purpose for the curricular emphasis will be abrogated, and information provided by the tests will have questionable utility as a vehicle to improve instructional practice.

The final criterion, end user satisfaction, raises the question, "is the real end user satisfied?" The definitional problems here relate to who is the real end user and how can satisfaction be determined? The real end user of most tests depends upon the specific test information produced. In dealing with curriculum-related information, the primary end user is likely the classroom teacher, who would use, for example, item analyses and objective mastery information to help fashion his or her instructional emphases. The principal might also make use of such information, as might the director of curriculum, in helping to assess the extent to which the school district's curricular

emphases are being effectively taught, or the extent to which they relate to those category objectives contained in nationally-normed tests. While the lay public, due largely to media coverage, will continue to be most interested in the test scores alone, one very positive effect of the renewed curricular emphasis on testing is that of transcending national percentile ranks or grade equivalent scores and focusing upon the link between test results and instructional improvement.

In order to answer the question, how can satisfaction be determined, a separate set of criteria should be developed. One of the means of measuring satisfaction might be the absence of complaints, either about the testing process, or the results. While this is not very scientific, those who have spent time in school districts know that it, in fact, does count for a great deal. Another, and perhaps more important criteria might be the utility of the information provided by the test in improving instruction, improving program evaluation, or improving curriculum design. Satisfaction in this case is directly linked to how the customer and end user makes use of the test information provided. This is clearly a higher level of satisfaction, but one worth reaching for.

CONCLUSION

I suspect that I've raised more questions than I've answered, but I'm not sure there are definitive answers or even definitive questions; most are merely impressions. What I have attempted to provide is a perspective--hopefully a somewhat different one and one which may result in the continuation of this discussion and its elevation to a useful dialogue.

Thank you.